

RADIO TV REPORTS, INC.

4435 WISCONSIN AVE. N.W., WASHINGTON, D.C. 20016, 244-3540

FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM ABC Evening News

STATION WMAL-TV
ABC Network

DATE September 17, 1974 7:00 PM

CITY Washington, D.C.

COMMENTARY BY HARRY REASONER

HARRY REASONER: The fact that President Ford chose to be candid in discussing the Central Intelligence Agency in its role in Chile and, by strong implication, in other unrevealed operations elsewhere is refreshing, but it doesn't really answer the moral and practical questions that keep coming up about this agency. We have contended before that, on balance, the CIA has a lot to apologize for to this nation, and we've noted that whenever anyone does criticize the agency, the answer is that we hear about only its failures, and they must steadfastly keep their successes secret. You have to admit they do that well.

The main point of all defenders of the CIA in its role of disrupting other legal governments was used by President Ford again last night. Look at the Russians, he said. They do more of this than we do.

I think the analogy is weak. If we start justifying our actions on the basis of what the Russians do, the field is limitless. You could begin by repealing the first ten amendments to the Constitution. And to say that it's all right to do what the Russians do outside the country, but not inside, is dangerous. We have seen in the past few years how these distinctions between foreign national security operations and domestic felonies can get blurred.

There is a practical way to limit the excesses of the CIA without going to the other extreme of declaring a dream world in which intelligence operations are no longer necessary. It is to enforce the separation of intelligence gathering, overt or covert, from intelligence using for covert operations involving illegal behavior in other countries.

Maybe there have to be operations of that kind in this imperfect world. But at least make sure that the decisions to engage in them are made responsibly by the executive and checked by legislative watchdogs and not made by the CIA.

There's a well established principle that an aircraft accident is not investigated only by the people who made the engines. It should apply here.

00777